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15

## ORACLES ET PROPHÉTIES DANS L'ANTIQUITÉ

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### QUESTIONS ADDRESSED TO THE BABYLONIAN ORACLE

THE *TAMĪTU* TEXTS (\*)

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The only surviving corpus of oracle questions from Babylonia is the so-called *tamītu* texts, questions addressed to Šamaš, the sun god, and Adad, the storm god, jointly. The term is that used in the ancient rubrics put at the end of each question: "a *tamītu* concerning..." (1). Most appear to date from the second millennium B.C., though we know them from library copies made in the first millennium. From Assyria, from the reigns of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal (681-627 B.C.), there exists a corpus of similarly styled questions addressed to Šamaš alone. These have been published or republished in full by I. J. Starr, *Queries to the Sungod. Divination and Politics in Sargonid Assyria*, (in coll. "State Archives of Assyria" Vol. IV, Helsinki, 1990) and are not therefore dealt with here. Similar questions could be put to other gods, as is proved by two Old Babylonian tablets from the reign of Ammi-šaduqa addressed to

(\*) The present writer began working on the *tamītu* texts some 35 years ago, and in 1965 read a paper to the XIV<sup>e</sup> Rencontre Assyriologique in Strasbourg on this subject, which was published the next year in *La Divination en Mésopotamie ancienne* (Travaux du Centre d'Études Supérieures Spécialisé d'Histoire des Religions de Strasbourg) (Paris, 1966): "The 'tamītu' Texts," pp. 119-123. Since this time the quantity of material has about doubled, and understanding has increased very considerably, so that publication of the corpus can be expected with a year or two. The previously published material (J. A. Craig, *ABRT* I, pls. 4 and 81-82, and the texts referred to below in footnotes 7, 8 and 12) is now only a small part of the total.

(1) Cf. "Appendix" à la fin de l'article (pp. 97-98).

Ninsi'anna, an astral god (2), but that is a rarity. The Babylonian *tamītu* texts differ from the Assyrian corpus in that all the Assyrian questions are from kings, while the Babylonian texts arose variously from kings or private persons. No doubt private persons in Assyria could also ask such questions (if they could afford the fees), but the private questions have not survived. So far no earlier Sumerian questions of this type addressed to sun-god and storm-god have been found, and these two as a duo appear not to occur in Sumerian texts of the third millennium. Such duos are rare in ancient Mesopotamian texts generally, and the few attested are usually minor gods: Šūllat and Ḫaniš, Lugal-girra and Meslamta'e'a. The surviving evidence suggests that Šamaš and Adad as a duo were a feature of northern Mesopotamia, Syria and Anatolia. The first noted occurrence is in the treaty between Ebla and AbarQA, where, at the end, they are invoked, apparently threatening evil on any wrong doing (in relation to the terms of the treaty?) (3). This dates from the third quarter of the third millennium B.C., and about half a millennium later a document found at, and probably composed in Mari, has Hammurabi of Babylon swear by Šamaš and Adad that he is and will remain an enemy of the Elamite ruler Šiwepalarḫupak.

The words used are:

Šamaš ša ša-me-e [b]ēl ma-[tim]

Adad ša ša-me-e [b]ēl p[u-ru-us-se] (4)

"Šamaš of heaven, lord of the land,

Adad of heaven, lord of the de[cision]".

Roughly contemporary with this is a damaged stele of a king, perhaps Šamši-Adad I of Assyria, which records his making offerings to Šamaš and Adad in Arrapha (5). This presumes a joint shrine of the two in that place, the only occurrence of such a thing known to the present writer. An Old Hittite ritual gives the words to be recited by the king on a particular occasion:

(2) L. DE MEYER in G. VAN DRIEL *et al.* (eds.), *Zikir Šumim. Assyriological Studies Presented to F.R. Kraus*, (Leiden, 1982), pp. 271-278.

(3) W. G. LAMBERT in L. CAGNI (ed.), *Ebla 1975-1985*, (Naples, 1987), p. 364.

(4) J.-M. DURAND in L. DE MEYER *et al.* (eds.), *Fragmenta Historiae Elamicae. Mélanges offerts à M. J. Stève*, (Paris, 1986), p. 111.

(5) A. K. GRAYSON, *RIM, Assyrian Periods I*, (Toronto, 1987), p. 64.

"To me, the king, have the gods — Sun-god and Storm-god — entrusted the land and my house".

O.R. Gurney, *Some Aspects of Hittite Religion*, (London, 1977), p. 9.

With these passages compare the opening line of each *tamītu*:

Šamaš bēl dīnim Adad bēl bīri

"Šamaš, lord of judgment, Adad, lord of extispicy"

Throughout northern Mesopotamia, Syria and Anatolia the storm god was a major god, often the most important, and in Anatolia the sun god (or goddess) was also a major deity (6). In Sumer and its later form, Babylonia, the storm was much less important, perhaps due to the very small amount of rainfall there, and so the storm god was relatively minor. In the same area the sun god was a second ranking god. As will be shown later, the form of the questions to Šamaš and Adad presumes that the answers did not come by the delivery of inevitable rulings based on some "laws of nature" but that the two gods themselves decided whether to say "Yes" or "No" to proposals put before them. Gods with this power needed to be important gods, since such "judgments" and "decisions" were entrusted to them.

The texts at our disposal come from both Assyrian and Babylonian libraries, most in fact from the Kouyunjik Collection in the British Museum, derived largely from Ashurbanipal's libraries. However, this source has yielded parts of quite different editions. There are tablets in typical Ashurbanipal hands with colophons naming this king, but there are also nine fragments, three of which join, in an atypical hand, probably written at Nimrud. It offers some of the same *tamītus* as occur in the genuine Ashurbanipal tablets, but in a different sequence. There is also one long *tamītu* on a tablet of unusual format, much wider than long, with a colophon of Nabū-zuqup-kēna, a famous Assyrian scribe from the time of Sennacherib, whose personal library Ashurbanipal took over to help build up his own. The genuine Ashurbanipal tablets have either one or two columns a side, each column being longer than it is wide, and each tablet normally offering a number of *tamītus*. Nimrud tablets

(6) O. R. GURNEY, *The Hittites*, (London, 1990), pp. 111-116.

in contrast have normally three columns a side. Three tablets from the Ashurbanipal libraries are distinctive in that each *tamītu* addresses first Šamaš and Adad, but immediately afterwards Šamaš alone, who continues to be addressed without Adad for the remainder of the *tamītu* (7). This tries to blend the older and the newer style, which is that of the Late Assyrian corpus. From Babylonian sites a single *tamītu* is written on a trimmed tablet from Nippur, lacking the rubric, but addressed to Šamaš and Adad in the traditional style (8). A few tablets, apparently from Babylon, with one column a side, but containing three or four *tamītus* each, have each commencing "Šamaš, *dīto*", the abbreviation presumably to be filled in as: "great lord, whom I am asking, answer me with a reliable 'Yes'" (*šamaš bēlu rabū ša ašallūka anna kīna aplannī*). This is the standard first millennium style of the Late Assyrian corpus, which should strictly be referred to as *tamītus* also, though this is not the convention. They lack the rubric of the library texts because they were the originals, and those involved in their creation and use did not need to be told what they were. Within their texts they are often alluded to as *tamītus*. The total number of Babylonian *tamītus* in the late libraries is not known, but the best preserved Nimrud tablet of six columns has a colophon recording that it was the 7th of its series, and a catch-line proves that an eighth existed. This surviving tablet has a total of 345 lines and six *tamītus*, but one of the six has 112 lines, by far the longest one known, so that such a tablet with *tamītus* of more normal length might have contained over ten. This may mean about 100 *tamītus* over eight tablets, but there are complications. First, the series could have begun with one or two tablets devoted to the rites involved at the recitation of the text and the obtaining of the answer. Secondly, it is not certain that the eighth was the last. More may have existed.

This corpus of Babylonian texts (whether written in Babylonian or Assyrian cuneiform) was part of the ancient *bārītu*, the corpus of the *bārū* priest. This man was the expert who wrote out the

(7) One is published by C. D. GRAY, *The Šamaš Religious Texts*, (Chicago, 1901), pl. xi.

(8) Published by E. LECHTY, in T. ABUSCH *et al.* (eds.), *Lingering over Words. Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Literature in Honor of William L. Moran*, (Atlanta, Georgia, 1990), pp. 301-304.

question, recited it in the appropriate place with prescribed rites, and then sought the "yes" or "no" answer through extispicy and more rites. Ancient texts explain his qualifications: he was carefully selected by an existing professional *bārū*, who could train only one successor, had to have a body free from physical imperfections, had to be descended from families of one of three cities (Nippur, Sippar, Babylon), and had to complete successfully a long training. This information comes from first millennium texts, though probably most of the qualifications, save for the ancestry from certain towns, were already in use in the second millennium. Nominally the profession was hereditary, but it is possible that sons could be adopted when natural heirs were lacking or unsuitable. Though we call the *bārū* a priest it does not follow that he was on the staff of a temple. Our first-millennium sources suggest that he was an independent person who went to a certain cultic locale to perform the rites for obtaining an answer, and that he paid for the facilities by bringing along a present (9). We do not understand how extispicy was employed for this purpose, since examining the internal organs of a sacrificial lamb does not readily lend itself to finding one of two alternatives. No doubt the process was complicated. When the Assyrian king Sennacherib wanted an answer to a very important question he employed a whole company of *bārūs* divided into two groups, each of which separately made their inspections and reported their results. The document which tells of Sennacherib's episode states that Šamaš and Adad were consulted, and a similar text about episodes in Esarhaddon's reign similarly mentions the two gods, unlike the actual questions from the reigns of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal (10).

The formulation of the question itself required great expertise, since the reliability of the "yes" or "no" answer depended on the precision and comprehensiveness of the question. Every possible

(9) See W. G. LAMBERT, "The Qualifications of Babylonian Diviners" in S. M. MAUL (ed.), *tikip santakki mala bašmu. Eine Festschrift für Rykle Borger*, (Groningen, 1997).

(10) Sennacherib: H. TADMOR and S. PARPOLA, "The Sin of Sargon and Sennacherib's Last Will" *State Archives of Assyria, Bulletin* III/1 (1989), pp. 3-51. Esarhaddon: W. G. LAMBERT, "Esarhaddon's Attempt to return Marduk to Babylon" in G. MAUER *et al.* (eds.), *Ad bene et fideliter seminandum. Festgabe für Karlheinz Deller*, in coll.: A.O.A.T., Vol. 220, (Kevelaer, 1988), pp. 157-174.

eventuality and complication had to be thought out and be covered in the wording. And this explains why the texts were preserved. They could serve as models. Thus three different questions about the astrological implications of the full moon begin with the same opening section. This use of the texts also explains why mostly the name of the original inquirer has been replaced with "so-and-so". The name of another inquirer could be put there in the recitation when the same question arose later. This re-use of texts also explains why, it appears, the answers are nowhere recorded. Had the texts been preserved for historical or antiquarian interest, the answers would have been as important as the questions.

Very diverse subjects are covered in the surviving questions. The only questioners whose names have not been replaced by "so-and-so" are Hammurabi, Abi-ešuḫ and Samsu-ditana, all kings of the First Dynasty of Babylon, and these all concern military matters. Another with only "so-and-so" asks about a planned campaign, setting out from the town of Padan to attack the land Ḫalman. Still another, from "so-and-so, ... king of Sumer and Akkad, mighty king, regent of Babylon" proposes taking along allies of the land Namri and Sutū and Aḫlamū auxiliaries to go on a plundering campaign. Even when a king is not mentioned one may suspect that he did in fact put the question. For example, the question is put whether the men who leave the city gate each morning to work in the fields outside will survive the day, free from attacks of marauding bands. Other topics reflect upper-class ambitions. Advice is sought on how to become a *šangū*-priest, a royal eunuch (*ša rēsi*) and a royal charioteer. The longest question asks whether a certain man will prosper in every possible way, including: "wherever the king, his lord, may send him". Two *tamītu*s concern farming: one about growing barley, the other about irrigating sesame. Another asks whether a planned hunting trip will be successful. Two questions involve survival and non-survival in the river ordeal. A number of questions concern the astrological complications of the full moon. More personal matters are not lacking. A man wishes to know if his prospective father-in-law will accept the gift he plans to take along to be accepted for marriage. The birth of sons was clearly important, since one question is whether a woman will complete a healthy pregnancy, and another wishes to know if the wife will present the husband with a son, since he already has daughters.

Most intimately of all, a husband wishes to know if his wife is telling him the truth.

The following chart illustrates that there is considerable freedom allowed in the formulation of the questions, though many parts are essential or common:

#### The Structure of a Babylonian *tamītu*

##### (1) *Invariable beginning*:

<sup>d</sup>Šamaš bēl dīnim <sup>d</sup>Adad bēl bīri

"Šamaš, lord of judgment, Adad, lord of inspection".

##### *Options*:

##### (2) Formal identification of person for whom question is put:

e.g. (a) "so-and-so, son of so-and-so" ("owner of this nail and finger")

(b) "owner of this hair and fringe (?)"

##### (3) Temporal limits within which the question has relevance:

(a) "within this month up to the 30th day, (and/or) the 2nd day of the next month"

(b) "within this year, from the month Nisan, the new year, up to the month Addar, the end of the year, in the passing and coming months"

*Always*: (4) Question: [anywhere after (1) and before 5 (b)].

##### (5) Persuasion of the two gods:

(a) "your great divinity knows" (flattery)

(b) "the seer will see, the hearer will hear" (implied threat?)

[(a) may occur anywhere after (1), (b) only after the question].

##### (6) Technical qualifications following on the question:

(a) "Why..."

(b) "Ignore that..."

##### (7) Endings:

(a) *lū nashā lū bēra* - "be they excerpted or selected"

(b) "(your divinity) Šamaš and Adad thus (*kī'am*)"



- (c) "Thus this lamb I 'do' (*eppu*, on the right, from the tip of the head to the tail, I bless it on the right, let there be truth on the right".

[If (b) and/or (c) occur, (a) must come first should it also occur, and (b) always follows (c) should they both occur].

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*Rubric* : "A *tamītu* concerning..."

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*Notes* :

(2) It was customary for a token of the questioner or the matter of the query to be held by the inquiring *bārû*, and for him to rest a hand on the head of the lamb as he put the question. Some hair of the inquirer and a piece of his fringe were traditional, but this later became, by hendiadys, "wool and fringe" (due to the use of the logogram *sig* both 'hair' and 'wool'?)<sup>(11)</sup>. Less common is (another hendiadys) "finger and nail" of the inquirer. One of the texts about agriculture has the *bārû* holding a clod of earth from the field in question, and yet another, about a horse being considered for the duty of pulling the chariot of the god Marduk, presents the *bārû* as holding some hair and bristles of that horse. This particular *tamītu* is unique (and also the only one so far to come from Assur) in that it has an individual ritual with it, during which a prayer to the horse is whispered in its left ear<sup>(12)</sup>.

(3) While some questions had relevance only to the immediate future and so automatically expired, others, such as in effect : "Shall I prosper ?" would be relevant so long as the inquirer lived, and this created the difficulty that circumstances might change over a period of time so that it was foolish to ask an open-ended question of that type. Thus a (lunar) month or calendar year are often specified as the period for which the answer is expected to be valid.

(5) The attempted persuasion of the gods being addressed must be taken together with the common imperative : "Answer me with a reliable 'Yes'". Often the question is a rhetorical question. In fact the questioner wants to push the gods to give a positive answer.

(11) For the meaning of *sissiktu* as 'fringe' see W. G. LAMBERT, *PEQ* 1994, p. 162.

(12) *KAR* 218 and unpublished duplicates.

As indicated before, they were not handing out cut-and-dried answers from primaevial principles, but were personally deciding upon the answers. So the questioner is often trying to persuade the gods to support his proposed course of action. "The seer will see, the hearer will hear" perhaps means that if the oracle deceives the questioner, then knowledge of this will spread, to the detriment of the gods' reputation.

(6) The technical qualifications aim to complete the comprehensive wording of the question. Thus a question about besieging a town lists all the known siege engines, since it was no doubt felt that an incomplete list would allow the possibility of an unreliable answer. The engines wanting from the list could or would be decisive on the occasion. However, the human mind can think of other ways in which the questions are not fully comprehensive. The "Why ?" clauses occur only twice, and both times too incompletely preserved to be intelligible. They are not paralleled in the Late Assyrian questions to Šamaš. The "Ignore that" clauses are more common in the *tamītus*, and invariable in the Last Assyrian corpus. They present, however, difficulties, and while their general purpose is clear as we have stated it, no single explanation seems to cover the precise purpose of all these clauses.

(7) Of the alternative endings, 7 (a) is best taken as a further attempt to fill possible holes in the wording of the questions : "Even if the question (despite our best efforts) is not fully comprehensive, we still hope to receive a reliable positive answer". The ending 7 (b) is more enigmatic, and is not complete as written. The opinion that it stands for the phrases at the end of prayers in another corpus of *bārû* texts is probably correct, so "thus" must be filled out as : "be present for me, by my utterance and the raising of my hand, in all that I do, and in the *tamītu* that I am blessing, let there be reliability". Ending 7 (c) offers another example of "right" as "propitious" here in unstated contrast to "left" as "unpropitious".

As an example one of the few complete *tamītus* is now given in transliteration and translation. It was published by E. Weidner in : *Archiv für Orientforschung*, 11 (1936/37), pp. 360-362, from a copy of T. G. Pinches, but due to one lacking wedge a whole section is badly misunderstood, and generally a new edition is required.

## K 2884

- 1-3 (traces)  
 4 ... ] *ana lib-<sup>r</sup> bi-šú ir-<sup>r</sup>-ru-bu*  
 5 ... ] *x i-bar-ri-qu*  
 6 *x [.....] inaddû(šub)<sup>u</sup>*  
 7 *ú-lu x [.....] x attalî kakkabāni<sup>meš</sup> MAN<sup>meš</sup>-ma*  
 8 *ú-lu attalî dšamaš<sup>r</sup> šá<sup>r</sup> arḫi annī(ne)<sup>i</sup> lu-ú nasha(zì)<sup>meš</sup> lu-ú bēra*  
 (bar)<sup>meš</sup>  
 9 *dšamaš ú<sup>i</sup> dadad ki-a-am ta-mit attalî d<sup>i</sup>sin*
- 
- 10 *dšamaš bēl di-nim dadad bēl bi-ri*  
 11 *ina lib-bi arḫi annī(ne) lu-ú ud.12.kam lu-ú ud.13.kam lu-ú*  
 ud.14.kam  
 12 *lu-ú ud.15.kam lu-ú ud.16.kam d<sup>i</sup>sin na-an-nar šamē<sup>e</sup> elluti<sup>meš</sup>*  
 13 *lu-ú ina ba-ra-ar-ti lu-ú ina qablūti(murub<sub>4</sub>)<sup>u</sup>*  
 14 *lu-ú ina šat-ur-ri attalā la išakkanu(gar)<sup>mu</sup>*  
 15 *lu-ú ad-ru-us-su la uš-ša-am-ma nišū<sup>meš</sup> māti*  
 16 *la ippallasa(igi.bar)<sup>meš</sup> sa-šū-ma la i-sap-pi-du*  
 17 *annanna bēl šipāti u sissikti(túg.síg) annūti(ne) ina ki-ḫul attalî*  
*d<sup>i</sup>sin šá arḫi annī(ne)*  
 18 *la ip-pa-la-as-si-ḫu ina bābi-šú šī-ga-ru la ip-par-ri-ku*  
 19 *e-zib šá attalî dšamaš<sup>mul</sup> dil-bat u kakkabāni<sup>meš</sup> MAN<sup>meš</sup>-ma*  
 20 *e-zib šá d<sup>i</sup>sin bēlu rabū<sup>u</sup> ana attalî dšamaš it-tum ú-kal-la-mu*  
 21 *e-zib šá ina arḫi annī(ne) it-tum innaddinū(sum)-ma mu-ḫa-bil-*  
*tum ina šamē<sup>e</sup>*  
 22 *u eršetim<sup>um</sup> in-nam-ma-ru d<sup>i</sup>sin ušurta(giš.ḫur) illammū(nigin)<sup>u</sup>*  
 MUL.DIM<sub>4</sub>-šú iḫēḫū-šú  
 23 *lu-ú ina lgi-šú arki-sū imitti(15)-šú sumēli(150)-šú izzazzu<sup>zu</sup> d<sup>i</sup>sin*  
*šá-bi-ḫa*  
 24 *šá-bi-ḫu IM ir-ri-mu u<sub>4</sub>-mu ia-ad-da-ru mūšu ia-ad-da-ru*  
 25 *lu-ú rubū SIG-ú lu-ú šarru lu-ú mārāt šarri lu-ú qé-ru-ub šarri*  
 26 *lu-ú sinništū na-ram-ti šarri šá šu-ru-up lib-bi imuttu(úš)<sup>mu</sup><sub>4</sub>*  
 27 *lu-ú miqitti(šub)<sup>u</sup> ummān(érin) šarri ina a-mat ili ibbaššū(gál)<sup>u</sup>*  
*ú-lu-ú ina giškakki*  
 28 *tāḫazi(mè) šēri ik-kaš-šá-du-ma nappaḫtu(būn) ina ekalli i-šak-*  
*ka-nu*  
 29 *e-zib šá ina u<sub>4</sub>-me an-nu-tu ma-la a-ta-mu-ku-nu-ši*  
 30 *me-ḫu-ú iḫēḫām<sup>im</sup> zunnu(šēg) i-za-an-nu-nu dadad pī-šú inaddū*  
*(šub)<sup>u</sup>*

31 *lu-ú nasha(zì)<sup>meš</sup> lu-ú bēra(bar)<sup>meš</sup> dšamaš u dadad ki-a-am*

32 [(x)] *x x x-ti attalî d<sup>i</sup>sin kīma labiri(sumun)-šú šá-ṭir bà-rim*

33 ...] *ma an x [ x x x ] x MAN ma AŠ*

## Translation

- 10 Šamaš, lord of the judgment, Adad, lord of the extispicy,  
 11 within this month, on the 12th, 13th, 14th,  
 12 15th or 16th day, Šin, light of the pure heavens,  
 13 either in the evening watch, the midnight watch,  
 14 or the morning watch, will not be eclipsed, will he ?  
 15 or will not come out obscured so that people of the land  
 16 will not be able to see him and will (not ?) lament ?  
 17 and so-and-so, owner of this woolen fringe, in grief at the eclipse of  
 Šin during this month,  
 18 will not prostrate himself and the bolts in his door will stay undrawn ?  
 19 Ignore that an eclipse of the sun, Venus, or the stars may change (for the  
 worse) ;  
 20 ignore that Šin, the great lord, may reveal an omen for an eclipse of the  
 sun ;  
 21 ignore that in this month an omen may be given, a dangerous portent  
 may be seen  
 22 in heaven and earth, Šin may be surrounded by a halo and his ...  
 may draw near to him,  
 23 or while (it) is stationed in front of him, behind him, to his right, or  
 to his left, Šin may be clouded  
 24 with mist or covered with dust, so that he will be eclipsed by day and  
 eclipsed by night,  
 25 or a ... noble, or the king, or the king's daughter, or a relative of the  
 king,  
 26 or a woman loved by the king, may die of grief,  
 27 and either plague at the command of a god will strike the king's army,  
 or it may be defeated  
 28 on the battlefield by force of arms and a revolution may take place  
 in the palace ;  
 29 ignore that on these days of which I have spoken to you  
 30 a fierce storm may come near, rain may fall and Adad may thunder.  
 31 Whether they be excerpted or selected. Šamaš and Adad, be present  
 for me !  
 By my utterance and the raising of my hand, in all that I do, and  
 in the *tamītu* that I am blessing, let there be reliability.  
 32 *Tamītu* concerning an eclipse of Šin. (Colophon)

## Notes on Translation:

The subject of the question is clear at the start. It asks whether there will be a lunar eclipse between the 12th and 16th of the then current (lunar) month. The grammar of the main question is less clear, and with it the precise nuance of the question. The verb in 14, *lā išakkanu*, has the negative and the subjunctive *-u*. Since this is a late copy one could dismiss the subjunctive as careless late orthography (note *ippallasa* but *isappidu* in 16). However, the same negative with subjunctive occurs in 18 (*la ippalassihu*), and in other late copies of *tamītu*. Without the subjunctive the question will be: "Will there not be a lunar eclipse on one of these days?". The questioner had reason to believe that an eclipse was imminent and wished to know for certain. If the subjunctive is taken seriously, it cannot be explained from conventional grammar, though one may wonder if the subjunctive in oaths is related. The oath is an emphatic statement, negated by *la*. If this is accepted (it is provisionally here), the question will have an emphatic content as we have rendered line 14. The question then seeks to persuade the gods to contradict the idea of an imminent lunar eclipse, and so to prevent its occurrence. This interpretation makes *lā iprusu* the negative of *liprus* in oracle questions, with meanings: "He should not, should he?" and "Should he?".

15 *adrūtu*, abstract noun from *adru*, not in the dictionaries, is clear on the tablet. Weidner's *at-ru-uš qāta* is wrong.

16 The second *lā* is difficult, because if the moon is invisible due to an eclipse one expects the people to lament, not to refrain from lamenting. The easiest solution is to delete the second *lā*.

19 The sign MAN is read *niš* = *šanū*, cf. *gizkim.bi a[b]* = *iš-na-a i-da-a-tu* (P. Garelli (ed.), *Le Palais et la royauté*, (XIX<sup>ème</sup> RAI, Paris, 1974) p. 436, l. 15, where in the context a change for the worse is clearly meant).

23-24 The text is read as if: *šabīḫa šabḫu tiṭṭa irrimu*. Dust storms were of course common in Babylonia. Though we have taken *ūmu* and *mūšu* as accusatives, they could be the subjects: "the day may be dark, the night may be dark". Neither gives perfect sense.

27 With an army *miqittu* normally means defeat, but since that is expressed unambiguously in the next clause, the meaning "plague" is adopted, though it is usually used with animals.

## APPENDIX

The word *tamītu* as used in this article is the technical term for the oracle questions being dealt with here, and also for the whole process of divination involved. In Old Babylonian texts it is written most commonly *tāwītum*, note also *ta-wi-it*, an archaism in an Ashurbanipal text Rm 222 + 513, 25 *apud* I. Starr, *The Rituals of the Diviner* (Bibl. Mesop., vol. 12, Malibu, 1983), p. 62. One Old Babylonian passage gives *ta'ītum* (*a-na ta-i-ti-ša*: JCS 11 (1957), p. 93, CBS 1734, 11). These writings imply a derivation from the root *'ww*, *awūm* "speak" most commonly used in the reflexive 1/2 *atwūm*, and by Middle Babylonian times the *w* has become *m*. In Old Babylonian texts the verb is most commonly written with *w*, but occasionally with *'* (*i-ta-ū-šu/šum*: F. Rochberg-Halton (ed.), *Language, Literature, and History*, (New Haven, 1987), p. 192, 47 and *PBS 1/1 2* = H. Behrens *et al.* (eds.), *Dumu-e-dub-ba-a. Studies in Honor of Åke W. Sjöberg* (Philadelphia, 1989), p. 326, 67; *a-ta-ū*: *MIO* 12 (1966), p. 48, 7, 9 and *TCL*, 18, 145, 12) and once with *m* (*i-ta-mu*: *Atra-ḫasīs* 1, 366). Thus a noun with *t* preformative relating to the 1/2 stem of the verb produces a correct form in *tāmītu*. Meaning, however, is more difficult, because the verb is commonly used for simple "speak" as in dialogue in myth and epic, but *tāmītu* is so far not attested meaning simple "speech". A complicating factor is the existence of a verb *wamū/tamū* "swear" (an oath), "exorcise" (by invoking a higher power), of which *tamū* can appear as *ta'ū*, and from which a noun *tamītu* exists. A passage in Nabnītu IVa suggests that the ancients had mixed up the two nouns:

*zag* = *ta-me-t[ū]*  
*zag.KU/ŠU* = *MIN ta-mu-ū* (*MSL* XVI, 89, 323-324)

The verb "swear" and noun "oath" occur in the preceding section:

*pā* = *ta-mu-ū*  
*sag.ba* = *ma-me-t[u]* (*ibid.* 312, 315, see the whole context)

The editor, I.J. Finkel, suggested "*tamū* in 324 perhaps mistake for *itamū*", but emendation should only be accepted after other explanations have failed. The two nouns *tāmītu* and *tamītu* were both stressed on the second syllable and it is possible that as spoken the distinction in the length of the first vowel which we know from etymology was not clear. In form the *tamītu* texts are prayers to the two gods, and the similar prayers to Ninsi'anna of Old Babylonian date (see above) actually use the word *ikribum* (*siskur*), while another Old Babylonian *bārītu* text employs the phrase *ina ikrib akarrabu* instead of *ina tamūt akarrabu* of the *tamītu* texts, see *JCS* 22 (1968), pp. 25-27. Since the *tamītu* texts were no doubt recited

orally it could be argued that *tāwītu* developed in meaning from "speech" to "spoken prayer". This argument, however, has to face the use of *tamītu* for omens. A tablet with lunar eclipse omens, Enūma Anu Enlil 22, ends with the following rubric :

*ta-mi-a-tum an-na-a-tum e-nu-ma* <sup>δ</sup>*sin mi-lu-uk-ta*  
*išakkanu(gar)* <sup>m</sup>*ilānu* <sup>mes</sup>*ša šamē* <sup>e</sup>*u eršetim* <sup>im</sup>  
 ..... *i-ši-im-mu* .....

"These are the *tamītus* when Sīn has a consultation  
 and the gods of heaven and netherworld decree ...".

*ACH Sin XXXV 50-51 = AfO 17 (1954-56), p. 88.*

Such omens, which were not recited in rites, are looked upon here as decrees of the gods in consultation, and our *tamītu* texts are similarly taken as answers to questions inviting the decision of the gods, and so *tamītu* can also be used for omens. For this sense *tamū* "swear" is better : the gods invoked in the *tamītus* were being called upon to use their power to give an infallible answer. In omens the assumed divine authors were believed to have used their power to reveal the truths contained. The Old Babylonian contexts with legal and other uses of *tāwītum* do not help, despite the useful discussion of D. Charpin in *NABU* 1988/85.